

Mr. SPECTER. The 'Victim-activated Landmine Abolition Act of 2006', which I am joining my friend from Vermont, Senator LEAHY, in introducing today would end the procurement of these indiscriminate weapons by the United States. We neither need these weapons not is it in our interest to continue to insist on the right to use them. They cannot distinguish between civilians and combatants, and as long as we stockpile them we cannot credibly urge others to stop using them against our troops. Does my friend from Vermont agree with me that our goal in sponsoring this legislation is to reaffirm United States leadership on this crucial humanitarian issue and to encourage other nations to follow our example?

Mr. LEAHY. That is correct and I thank the senior Senator from Pennsylvania. I have been pleased to have him as a partner over the years on legislation to eliminate these inhumane weapons, and I welcome the opportunity to do so again today. We want to send a message to the world that victim-activated landmines and other weapons designed to be victim-activated are beyond the pale. We have seen what they can do to our troops. We have seen what they do to a child who picks up one of these seemingly harmless objects, only to have it blow off an arm or worse. These weapons do not belong in the arsenals of civilized nations.

Mr. SPECTER. I thank my friend, who has led this campaign for so many years. Landmines and other munitions that are designed to be victim-activated are inherently indiscriminate. In that sense, they are no different from poison gas. They should be abolished and replaced with weapons that have a man-in-the-loop who can distinguish between an enemy combatant and a civilian. The Department of Defense has this technology. It is time for the United States to adopt a policy that is consistent with the force protection needs of our troops and with the moral values of the American people.

By Mr. ENSIGN (for himself, Mr. NELSON of Florida, Mr. COLEMAN, Mr. LIEBERMAN, Mr. SANTORUM, and Mr. FRIST):

S. 3769. A bill to encourage multilateral cooperation and authorize a program of assistance to facilitate a peaceful transition in Cuba, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

Mr. ENSIGN. Mr. President, at long last, Fidel Castro's reign of terror over the Cuban people may be coming to an end. Fidel Castro is incapacitated. He has handed over control of the government to his brother, Raul. The Cuban Government wants us to believe that it is a temporary measure—that Castro just needs to recuperate from surgery. But we don't know the truth—we can't know the truth, because lies are the byproduct of tyranny. And tyrannies are notoriously opaque. For all we

know, it may be that Fidel already has already spent his last day as Cuba's leader.

I believe that now is the time for the U.S. Government to push for a peaceful transition to democracy in Cuba. It is a travesty that more than a decade after the cold war ended, a brutal communist dictatorship is still oppressing people 90 miles from our border. It would be an even greater travesty if the United States did not do everything in our power to ensure that after Fidel leaves power—one way or another—Cuba becomes free.

Let's join together in support of the Cuban people and in support of freedom, and let's adopt this bill.

We need to send a signal to all the dissidents and political prisoners in Cuba that we have no illusions about the nature of Fidel Castro's regime—that we know of their plight and stand ready to help them. When Ronald Reagan called Russia the "evil empire," it brought hope to the dissidents and political prisoners in the Soviet gulags. They knew that the people and leaders of the United States were united with them. They were not alone.

That is why I am introducing a bill today that authorizes assistance to the OAS for Cuba human rights activities and election reform. It also authorizes a fund to support independent civil society-building efforts. That includes assistance to political prisoners and their families, other dissidents, independent libraries, youth organizations, workers' rights activists, agricultural cooperatives, associations of the self-employed, journalists, economists, and medical doctors. And it creates the "Fund for a Free Cuba" to provide assistance to a transition government in Cuba.

This bill is consistent with the recommendations in the July 2006 Commission for Assistance for a Free Cuba report. We need to move this legislation now, when it can have the biggest impact. The people of Cuba are watching and listening. We need to show them that the leaders of the United States are willing to join them in their quest to be free. They need to know that they are not alone.

By Mr. MENENDEZ (for himself and Mr. LAUTENBERG):

S. 3770. A bill to require a pilot program on the facilitation of the transition of members of the Armed Forces to receipt of veterans health care benefits upon completion of military service, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, since the March 2003 start of the Iraq war, more than 19,157 members of our Nation's Armed Forces have been injured, more than 18,777 of them wounded in action.

Imagine that you are one of those wounded. You are an enlisted marine serving your country in Iraq. Your convoy is attacked by Iraqi gunmen and your transport explodes, killing several

of your fellow soldiers and wounding many more. You are seriously wounded, so you're medevaced to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center and then transported to an appropriate medical facility in the U.S. for further stabilization and treatment.

As you begin the long road to recovery in the hospital, you may be approached by a Department of Veterans Affairs, VA, counselor who provides you with information about VA medical benefits and vocational rehabilitation and employment services. You may or may not meet with someone from the VA. But you're not ready to think about those things yet. You just want to get better and rejoin your fellow marines in Iraq.

Several months later, as you convalesce, Department of Defense, DOD, determines that you should be discharged due to the seriousness of your injuries. But, the discharge process won't become official for at least nine months, and you can't access VA services until it does. This leaves you in limbo, caught somewhere between the DOD and VA systems.

You finally return home, still convalescing from your injuries and while there, you finally receive your discharge papers. This development means no more access to the support you received during active duty, including health care. In order to receive medical care, you need to begin enrollment in the VA system to access medical services. Enrollment is a slow and difficult process, and, in your seriously wounded state, you come up against a blizzard of paperwork, Byzantine procedures, and a number of overworked VA caseworkers.

Your family has no idea how to get you into the system quickly and without having to pay more money for interim care until the VA benefits kick in.

As the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan grind on, these stories are all too frequent. Many wounded soldiers, service men and women are faced with the prospect of a premature end to their military service and are struggling to reenter civilian life, often with permanent disabilities. And they now have to find their way to the VA. They need help finding their way so they can get the care they deserve. They have served their country and now their country, their military, owes them our best in return.

That is why I am proud to introduce the Veterans Navigator Act, a bill that would expand and enhance the important work done by VSOs and other non-governmental organizations to guide our Nation's service men and women to and through the VA healthcare system. It would, in fact, acknowledge the work of these organizations by providing \$25 million in grants over 5 years to augment their capabilities.

The "navigator" concept is not new. It is similar to the Patient Navigator demonstration program I introduced and which was subsequently enacted